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THE JURISPRUDENCE OF JOHN HOWARD YODER

THOMAS SHAFFER*

John Howard Yoder, prophet and theologian, died in his office at Notre Dame on December 30, 1997, the day after his seventieth birthday. Peter Steinfels's obituary in the *New York Times* of January 7, 1998, described my friend and colleague Yoder as "a Mennonite theologian whose writings on Christianity and politics had a major impact on contemporary Christian thinking about the church and social ethics." Steinfels did not describe Yoder's thought as jurisprudence; neither, for that matter, did Yoder. But there was (and is), throughout Yoder's scholarship, an implicit theology of law, a jurisprudence. A jurisprudence that is particularly noticeable in his last book, *For the Nations* (Eerdmans, 1997).

Yoder was, Steinfels wrote, first and foremost a pacifist. He quoted Yoder's sometime colleague at Notre Dame, the Methodist theologian Stanley Hauerwas: "After World War II and the criticism of pacifism by Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian nonviolence had lost credibility. Yoder turned that around."

Beyond that, or within it, Steinfels wrote, Yoder was (as Hauerwas is) a theologian who taught that "the work of Jesus was not a new set of ideals or principles for reforming or even revolutionizing society, but the establishment of a new community, a people that embodied forgiveness, sharing, and self-sacrificing love in its rituals and discipline. In that sense, the visible church for him was not the bearer of Christ's message; it was itself to be the message."

"Mr. Yoder understood the church as a creative minority that would always live in a way that contrasted with the surrounding society. He criticized all tendencies for the church to assume a blanket responsibility for the ethics of the secular world." As the collected sermons, lectures, and essays in *For the Nations* demonstrate (and continuing to quote from the obituary by Peter Steinfels), Yoder "rejected [the] charge that he was calling for the church to withdraw into isolation, and he devoted much of his writing to demonstrating how neither his pacifism nor his sectarianism prevented the church from providing a crucial witness to the secular world or from combating a host of injustices."

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Steinfels cited Yoder's most widely read book, *The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 1972; 2nd ed. 1994), as well as his lifetime of Christian witness that began among the Mennonites in France, when Yoder was eighteen. "As a writer, Mr. Yoder was clear and direct, never skirting differences but always trying to represent his opponents fairly. A proponent of nonviolence, he nonetheless criticized many of the varieties of pacifism advocated by Christians as sentimental, resting on naively optimistic, utopian views of human nature or on strictly utilitarian calculations of pacifism's effectiveness compared with other forms of opposing evil."

In addition to, or threaded through, Yoder's project is his theology of law. Mennonites, only a few of them lawyers, tend to shy away from legal solutions, and therefore from discussion of them. I have often quoted something Yoder said to a Notre Dame college student of his, who later became a law student of mine. This young man, impressed by Yoder's teaching, asked his theology teacher if a Christian could be a lawyer—and then proceeded to say why he thought not. Yoder heard him out before he said, "Well, maybe a Christian cannot be a lawyer."

But the young man came to law school anyway. And Yoder later told me he would not have pressed his answer to our student's question. The better question, Yoder later said to me, is whether the things a lawyer does in modern America are the things a person who proposed to follow Jesus might do. That is, I finally decided, after many uses of the earlier quotation, the way to see the issue. And that is the way our student took what he learned from Yoder; he has, I think, lived with Yoder's later question in mind for three decades as a lawyer in America.

So, I want to write here as if the question Yoder formulated later is the stance a believer is to take with regard to the law. The answer I try here to describe is the product of Yoder's radical reading of the Bible. It is—as Steinfels implied—in disagreement with Yoder's colleagues in academic theology, all across the spectrum.

At the right end of the spectrum are those in teaching, in the church, on law faculties, and in the press, who insist that the question—a *moral* question—has to be answered from a position within the modern American nation-state. The most prominent lawyer (law-teacher) voices from this end of the spectrum say it is immoral for a believer to give religious reasons for her jurisprudence, or for a believer who holds legal power to follow her faith in deciding whether and how to impose coercive state power. (A modification, only slightly to the left, would permit a believer to consult her faith when she exercises state power, or would recognize that she is bound to do so if she really is a believer, but then holds that it is immoral for her to be candid about what she has done.)

At the other end of the spectrum are those in communities of faith who decline participation in the law—as voters, or as lawyers, or as holders of governmental office. Ernst Troeltsch called these believers “sectarian,” a term Steinfels picked up, and one that becomes pejorative among those who accuse withdrawn believers of being irresponsible. Yoder also took issue with those at this left end of the spectrum; his reasoning with them makes up much of the contents of *For the Nations*.

In between are a number of nuanced theological positions, and what I think of as a struggle among theologians who “do” social ethics, to locate an argument that accepts, as Martin Luther did, that the Kingdom of Faith has and should have influence—open influence—on the Kingdom of the Law (whether or not the bridge has lanes in both directions, that is, whether or not Luther’s Kingdom of the Law should have influence on the Kingdom of Faith).

Against the *religious* (“sectarian”) end of the spectrum, Yoder argued for a religious jurisprudence that speaks out, whether or not those at either end of the spectrum think it should: “[T]he love of a sovereign God drives us into concern for the social order.... God does not simply tell us to accept the existing order; he tells us also that it must change.” (182)(Page references are to *For the Nations*.) Yoder turned to the Bible as if it were a charter for law and government and—just in case O.W. Holmes, Jr., might have been listening—the source as well of a theory of history. And not only a *theory* of history, but a position that itself is history. Yoder cited as political—i.e., I think, jurisprudential—examples William Penn, William Lloyd Garrison, and such 19th century American evangelical leaders as Alexander Campbell, all of whom were “sectarians” demonstrating “concern for healthy political life.... This long history refutes the notion that the type of community stance which the sociologist calls ‘sectarian’ is without wider interest or impact.” (21, 21n.11)

Still toward the left end of the spectrum, Yoder addressed the moral issues in civil disobedience. He was wary of those (believers) who practice non-violent political and legal pressure in order to take power in the name of justice; he said of that position that it is “less than loving and no less intrinsically sinful than another kind of warfare.” (100) Here especially he did not admit that his demanding biblical jurisprudence was weakened by being evidently ineffective: Claiming at least passing support from H. Richard Niebuhr, Yoder said, “[I]t may be all right sometimes to acknowledge that there is nothing we can do to fix the world.” (23n.17) “If we saw our obedience more as praising God and less as running his world for him, we would be less prey to both despair and disobedience.” (195)

Yoder's biblical touchstone, offered from within his Anabaptist tradition, and offered publicly, was what the Prophet Jeremiah wrote to the captive Israelites in Babylon: "Seek the welfare of any city to which I have carried you off, and pray to the Lord for it; on its welfare your welfare will depend." (Jeremiah 29:7, N.E.B.) "For Jeremiah it is mission," Yoder argued; it was not merely a way to get along until the captivity ended, but a long-term project Jews undertook before the Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt.

Toward the middle of the spectrum, Yoder's most persistent quarrel was with the mainline church—with the large, established Protestant denominations and the American Roman Catholic Church. Here, like the late radical Christian lawyer William Stringfellow, Yoder invoked references from the Apostle Paul about the powers and dominions of the world, "[t]he Pauline vision according to which 'the powers' which frame our lives are at one and the same time *both* creatures of God for our good *and* oppressors...." (35) The powers in modern American life are represented in what Yoder might have identified (but did not) as American civil religion—in the American dream, which is made up of strands, like a rope: "the aggressive hope for history of Puritan Protestantism, the philosophical credibility of progress as a cosmic drive, and the experience of white America's successful seizure of the continent." (129)

The question for Christians—the question Yoder put when he got American civil religion in his sights—is whether it is possible to keep on believing when one of these strands breaks, when civil religion does not work out. (131) (Civil religion is, for one thing, not likely to see suffering as a means of social change. [131]) Those in the alternative church (Yoder often called it the believers church), by contrast, leave deadlines and mechanisms up to God; they see no correlation between the ultimate victory of God and present prosperity or power.

Most distinctively, those in the alternative church do not seek political and legal solutions through violence: "That violence in the cause of freedom is morally in a different category from violence for other causes is an ancient notion, usually (in our history) correlated with white triumphalism." (131n.8) As this suggests, Yoder's was thinking by way of contrast of Dr. King's community: "An oppressed community is sustained by a hope which is not verified first of all by experience, and therefore cannot be falsified by apparent defeat. The community which sustained the hope was first of all authorized to hope not by its experience of effective militancy but by singing and preaching and mothering and eating together in the light of the good news.... [T]here are other patterns of power for change than the victory of the good guys.

That the Crucified One is now 'seated at the right hand of the Father' means that 'he has the *whole* world in his hands,' without its being in *our* hands." (137)

JEWS

In making contrasts such as the comparison of the mainline church with congregations in the Black Church, Yoder spoke mainly of Christians. But he was beginning to develop an historical theology around a radical Judaism that would reach from the Prophet Jeremiah, to the series of events that led to the separation of Jewish Christianity from early rabbinic Judaism, to what Rabbi Joseph Solovietchik spoke of as Jewish involvement in all of humankind's modern confrontation with the cosmos. As nearly as I can tell, Yoder did not get as far with this project as he would have liked; in any case, one of the sad losses that came with his death was a fuller development of his respect for Judaism.

In *For the Nations*, he recognized that Christian moral standards "derived from, and [are] therefore...fruitfully illuminated by, older Jewish models of how to relate to this world's powers." (66) In his description of what he called "the Jeremianic Model" (66-70):

—There is no need to seize power. God is sovereign over history. (67)

—The "ultimate righteous social order" is the business of the Messiah. (67)

—Efforts (other efforts) to establish a national kingship are not blessed by God. (67) "It is not only that the Maccabees and the Zealots did not ultimately triumph. Their first successes led them to become oppressive and to fall out among themselves. Not because they were weak but because they were strong and 'succeeded,' they fell prey to what they claimed to defeat." (67, n.39)

In what Yoder described as the "Mosaic project," the captivity of the Jews in Babylon and the destruction of the first Temple were not a parenthesis; they were a beginning "under a firm, fresh prophetic mandate," to witness to the nations, (53) "to retrieve the heritage of the centuries during which the people of God discharged their mission without being in charge of the world." (61)

The life and witness and teachings of the rabbi Jesus were continuous with this Mosaic project. "[T]he Gospel account affirms a sequence of historic projects in which precursor and successors both understand God to be working in the real world to establish justice." (204) Neither the gospels nor the rabbis reduced religion to ethics (as the American Social Gospel did). The Jeremianic model proclaimed "new

social possibility for the human story,” and, I think, a new jurisprudence as well. (204) “The community [Jesus] creates is the product and not the enforcer of that new regime. His followers will live from, not toward the victory of Christ. Our life is to proclaim, not to produce, the new world.” (209) Which, as to Yoder’s developing theory about Judaism, is to say that, for Jesus, there was not a new social goal; his social goal was the Mosaic social goal. (210)

This Jewish and Christian theological social ethic is precisely *legal*: “We are not called to make the bread of the world available to the hungry; we are called to restore the true awareness that it always was theirs. We are not called to topple the tyrants, so that it might become true that the proud fall and the haughty are destroyed. It already is true; we are called only to let that truth govern our own choice of whether to be, in our turn, tyrants claiming to be benefactors.” (211) Law, then (and this shows how he took issue with Reformation jurisprudence), is a form of grace. (213)

He took issue as well with Catholic natural-law politics and jurisprudence: “[W]hen the ‘nature of things’ is properly defined, the organic relationship to grace is restored. The cross is not a scandal to those who know the world as God sees it, but only to the pagans, who look for what they call wisdom, or the Judaeans, who look for what they call power.... [T]he choice of Jesus was ontological: it risks an option in favor of the restored vision of how things really are. It has always been true that suffering creates shalom. Motherhood has always meant that. Servanthood has always meant that. Healing has always meant that. Tilling the soil has always meant that. Priesthood has always meant that. Prophecy has always meant that. What Jesus did...was that he renewed the definition of kingship to fit with the priesthood and prophecy. He saw that the suffering servant is king as much as he is priest and prophet. The cross is neither foolish nor weak, but natural.” (212)

AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION

To those who argue that it is immoral for people of faith to invoke their faith as bearing on public issues in a secular legal order, Yoder’s response was complex. He was willing to discuss political (and legal) issues in the “language” of his critics; he was willing, I suppose, not to use biblical language where biblical language did not communicate; and he was willing to accept small victories when his jurisprudence told him to try for more. The authority that faith gives, he wrote, “is not coercion but trust, which is ‘the law within law.’” (28) Fidelity and relevance are

not a “null-sum trade-off.” (28n.26) And therefore, as Martin Luther might have put it, the person of faith can use the language of the dominions and powers and take the risk that he might be right.

Still, Yoder was not willing to hide his faith and his witness, not willing to hide either what it bade him say nor the deepest reasons for his saying it, not willing that Christianity be only “the general label for anyone’s good intentions.” (112) “Not whether the message is for all humankind is the question, but what the message is.” (29)

Which, of course, sounds contradictory if not paradoxical: How could he argue in public, using the language of American civil religion, and not thereby violate his determination to be witness to the *fact* that the Kingdom has come, that Jesus is Lord? Yoder’s answer was to accept small victories, incremental gain, and circumstantial agreement—precisely because he did not see himself and the believers church of which he was both member and spokesman as responsible for making the legal order work. It is a matter of seeking the welfare of the city, not seeking to take control of the city. (Jesus is already in control.)

ETHICAL AND FACTUAL DISCERNMENT

And that raises two jurisprudential issues of some interest. One of these is the source of and reason for political and legal argument. The other is the process by which that source and reason are connected to the concrete issues on which the believer speaks to the civil community and to the nation-state.

Source and Reason. There is such a thing as a biblical jurisprudence. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder took issue with Christian theologians who taught that Jesus of Nazareth did not have a political (and legal) agenda. There is a social agenda in the New Testament, as Yoder read scripture, which is both substantive and procedural.

The *substantive* agenda is:

- that the regime recognize the dignity of each of its members and all of its members—male and female, Jew and gentile, slave or free;
- that the regime be capable of practicing, and in fact practice, forgiveness (“Social scientists call it conflict management” [31]);
- that the regime practice justice in a radical, biblical sense, so that “there will never be any poor among you” (Deuteronomy 15:3, N.E.B.);
- that the public discourse in and under the regime be a discourse in which every person listens and every person is invited to speak, in which each member contributes (I Corinthians 14:26); and

—that the results of public discourse give influence to each of its members, as (to invoke the Pauline metaphor) each part of the human body has its irreplaceable function. (28-33)

This substantive agenda is open to argument, but it is also the constitution of what the German theologian Gerhard Lohfink called a “contrast society.” The local community of believers can, more readily than the civil community or the nation-state, put this agenda into practice, as *its* law. Its persuasive office in the secular community is carried out as it does so, and as it is seen to do so. It is plausible that a community of believers can practice equality, equal dignity, forgiveness, and reconciliation, not only because that is the sort of community it wants to be, but in order to instruct the secular society around it. “The church is called to live, and is beginning to live (to the extent to which we get the point), in the way to which the whole world is called.” (46) “[T]here is no reason to want to make sense to your neighbors if you have no identity worth sharing with them.” (41)

Yoder was earnest and consistent about this, no more clearly so than when he took up Jesus’s teaching about loving enemies and the injunction to decline the trappings of power in favor of servanthood. (47-49) Jesus, Yoder said, was not talking about a commune or an eschatological utopia:

“The ‘communitarians’ of our time, for whom all meaning is internally self-authenticating...will not risk the challenge of telling the world that servanthood, enemy love, and forgiveness would be a better way to run a university, a town, or a factory. They pull back on the grounds that only they have already experienced the power and novelty of that threefold evangelical cord in the worship and ministry of the church. They affirm integrity but at the cost of witness.” (49)

Yoder quoted Dr. King: “When I took up the cross I recognized its meaning . . .” “The cross may mean the death of your popularity. It may mean the death of a foundation grant. It may cut down your budget a little, but take up your cross, and just bear it. And that’s the way I have decided to go.” (145) Yoder said that Jesus, when he talked about taking up the cross, was talking about “the specific punishment for insurrection. Followers of Jesus, he warns them, must be ready to be seen and to be treated as rebels, as was going to happen to him.” (207) And, of course, as happened to Dr. King.

Yoder studied under Karl Barth. (Steinfels pointed out that Yoder gave Barth a fifty-page critique of Barth’s teaching on pacifism, the day before Barth was to sit on Yoder’s doctoral examination committee.) Yoder was a follower of Barth in proclaiming an alternative (biblical) legal order, a legal order that is universal but nonviolent, and not

coercive. “[I]t cannot be imposed, only offered. It cannot be excluded by being declared to be alien, or ‘private’ or ‘personal’ or ‘sectarian,’ but only by not (i.e., not yet) being heard.” (25)

It is important to emphasize here that Yoder was talking about what Gerhard Lohfink described as a “contrast society.” Yoder did not talk about individual righteousness very much. And, particularly in his politics and his jurisprudence, he did not talk about individual “rights” but about the witness of the community of faith. This was his politics and his jurisprudence because it was first of all his theology. “Classical evangelical preaching,” in its focus on the individual, is, he said, “too small an answer” (184) Specifically:

—The church needs to show that there are righteous ways in which power can be used.

—It needs to take account of the “ethical insights, concerns, rights, and decisions of people who are not in power” (184, perhaps meaning to point to the fact that only individuals have rights in American law).

—The mainline Christian church in America gives too much importance to coercive power and prestige: “[I]f you place your hopes for the welfare of Italy and the glory of God in Italy on the conversion of Mussolini, you are no longer genuinely free to ask whether Fascism is wrong.” (184)

—The mainline church “dodges the fact, which a truly honest individual in a high position is very clear about, that many evils are matters of structure and not of inner disposition, so that the most unselfish heart in the world cannot necessarily ‘use for good’ or ‘clean up’ a fundamentally vicious structure.” (184)

Process. Yoder’s jurisprudence points less to biblical principle than to a biblical process of communal discernment: “[T]here is a particular point where the redeemed individual and [the] social structure are both present, namely, in the Christian community as a visible body within history.... “The primary social structure through which the gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community.” (185, quoting *The Politics of Jesus* 153, 2nd ed.) Which is to argue that the Christian community is not only a model, a “contrast society,” but also a resource; not only itself the biblical, ethical message but also itself an epistemology, a way to know and a way to know what to do—and, in both senses, probably, is heir to the Hebrew Prophets. (186)

He argued that politics (and jurisprudence), taken up in the community of the faithful, will turn out both more reliable and more critical than politics (and jurisprudence) taken up in the civil community or in the nation-state. (186) Beyond those marks of soundness, and more important than either of them, the community of the faithful is able to

be experimental, where the civil community and the nation-state are not. The church, so understood, is “a place where prophetic discernment is tested and confirmed, the organ for updating and applying the understanding of the revealed law of God, the context for the promised further guidance of the Spirit.” (187) “The church is both the paradigm and the instrument of the political presence of the gospel.” (189)

The church, understood as a discerning community, is able to be a place of deliberation, a paradigm for law and government, and the instrument of justice, because its processes give it credibility, and because it does not seek political or legal power: “[T]he focus on the good guys getting control...becomes wrong...when control itself is seen as the goal and when power is seen as a neutral quantity easily usable for good.... [P]ower tends to corrupt; you need no theology to be more realistic than the American mood has been about ‘government by the people’ through their elected representatives.... [S]ervanthood is not a position of nonpower or weakness. It is an alternative mode of power...a way to make things happen...a way to be present. When we turn from coercion to persuasion, from self-righteousness to service, this is not a retreat but an end run. It brings to bear powers which, on balance, are stronger than the sword alone...truth rediscovered...the dissenter willing to suffer...the power of the people to withhold confidence...the attraction of an alternative vision...the integrity that accepts sacrifice rather than conformity to evil.” (190-191)

Yoder meant, when he wrote this way, to be talking about what people do to their tangible, visible, earthy communities: “Who is in high office or what laws are written will make less difference for many indices of where things will have gone...than the cumulation of an infinity of tiny deeds: mothers who feed their children, children who learn their lessons, craftsmen who finish a job, doctors who get the dosage right, drivers who stay on the road, policemen who hold their fire. The lunge for the large view is often the beginning of self-deception. The predilection to see one’s own small deed as significant or as right when and because it can be shown to contribute to some overall victory scenario overburdens punctual responsibility in decision and undervalues the continuities of character and covenant. The kingdom is like the grain growing while no one watches (Mark 4:26f), like the hidden leaven silently taking over the flour bin (Matt. 13:33). Contrary to the proverb, watching a pot does not keep it from boiling, but it does misdirect the pot watcher’s creativity.” (244)

The community of faith in which and from which those things are done is also a place to seek the truth about what is going on and to discern a plan for what to do about it: “The church of God’s people

gathered as a unit, as a people, gathered to do business in his name, to find what it means here and now to put into practice this different quality of life which is God's promise to them and to the world and their promise to God and service to the world." (177) In *The Priestly Kingdom* (1984), Yoder spoke of this as "the communal quality of belief."

POLITICS AND JURISPRUDENCE

Is this politics? And then, if it is politics, is it also jurisprudence? (Which would be to set aside for the moment whether, as the Critical Legal Studies movement taught us, all law is politics.) Yoder argued, from Indiana and Kentucky to Europe, from Latin America to South Africa, that *all* of theology is politics: "How you see the adversary and the wider human community is the very substance of politics. Love of the enemy and respect for the out-group is not politically *popular*, but it is politically relevant and politically right." (193) It is politics replacing "the legacy of 'Christendom' according to which the authority to speak of the public good belonged to the king, who had that role by divine right and graciously shared some of it with his noble cousins of the aristocracy, and some of it with his noble cousins in the clergy. That was the prevailing system from the fourth century to the nineteenth, although other perspectives began to break through the crust beginning in the fifteenth." (19) It is politics replacing democratic liberalism (which is, when you trace through the last quotation, and make some minor substitutions, not all that different from the politics of Christendom).

Speaking to faculty and students in the Roman Catholic seminary in Baltimore, in 1994, Yoder said: "The vision of things I have been invited to present...is at home in no one semantic world, in no one social world." (51) Speaking in a world where his vision of things was closer to being at home, at his own Goshen College, in Indiana, three decades earlier, he reminded those in the believers church that trust in processes of discernment is more important than taking positions: "Part of what it means to be the believers church is to believe that there are answers that we don't have yet." (161) Writing for the World Council of Churches in 1980, he said, "'Sign,' rather than 'instrument,' describes more properly how our words and deeds 'work.'" (240)

I conclude at this point that Yoder's project was, as he said, political, and, I think, jurisprudential; and that his project was politics and jurisprudence because it was (not based on or rooted in, but was) the community of faith. He refused to define the church as "an aggregation of loose individuals each trying by himself to be Christian in his place." (114) He refused to define it as an administrative structure; on the

contrary, the church is, he said, “a congregation, a rediscovery, a way to overcome Constantinianism as it protects against the special distortions of seeking authority for a clerical elite.” (114)

The church is “the body of persons gathered around the name of Jesus Christ.” (115) “[T]he church is the one society in which the terms of membership—namely, the confession of faith and cross-bearing obedience to Jesus Christ—would, to the extent to which it is honored, make people less rather than more selfish.” (115) Because people in the church are made less selfish, the church as politics (and as jurisprudence) is “alternative leverage on the social order” (148), so that its very believing is an “alternative stance in the social order.” (148)

When Yoder wrote this way, he recognized that a community of faith *could* function politically by being its biblical processes. Given that understanding, he could (and did) talk about communities from Abel’s to Abraham’s to Jesus’s: “For these people, to be *believing* meant acting in obedience despite the lack of evidence that obedience would ‘work.’” (149) What these biblical models of the political (and legal) did was “to hope, to love, on grounds that the world cannot take away.” (150) The biblical processes *are* politics.

Several of the chapters in *For the Nations* were talks directed to communities of “sectarian” Christians. To them, and, when he sought with mainline Christians to clarify the witness of the believers church, he said: “Many hopeful things are also possible things to do. Thus when I say we are freed from the pessimism of system-immanent analysis, that does not mean that we don’t care about mechanisms and social analysis, political analysis, and calculation of results. It means that that caring is held within a wider trust.” (151) “[T]he imagery of the hope that makes no sense but keeps us obeying even when we don’t see the victory behind it is still, for this theme, the clearest way to live in a biblical cosmology.” (153)

Some of Yoder’s description of the believers church was a matter of what has come to be called “lifestyle.” In law, in politics, in professional life, members of the believing community will manifest a certain “commonality of style,” he said: division of labor, a capacity to be effective that depends on “having a community in the stance of opposition”—and “it is worth reminding ourselves that the value of the believers church approach to problems is partly that it offers, practically, better ways to do things” (154). Without being in the mainstream, without being among those who “take responsibility for managing the culture.” (155)

And that, of course, requires “an ongoing critique relative to our own identity.” (157) I thought when I read that of a story I heard, years ago,

from a scholar whose research had been among the Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Someone had noticed that those farmers—who have for centuries powered their machinery with horses and taken their families to town in quaint little buggies—had started using a corn sheller powered by a gasoline engine. They put the sheller on a wagon drawn by horses, took it to the field, and cranked it up to shell corn. The person who noticed this wondered if using a corn sheller was consistent with Anabaptist doctrine on machinery. The answer he got was that the Amish do not have a doctrine on machinery; they have a way of life; and they decide, when a farming device comes to their attention, whether the device will weaken their way of life. They decided, in the case put, that a gasoline powered corn sheller, operated a good space away from the house, would not.

AGGRESSIVE PACIFISM

Finally, a word from Yoder on the difference between being violent and being aggressive:

The obituary Steinfelds wrote led with Yoder's pacifism, and much of Yoder's significance as a prophet and teacher will (whether it should or not) boil down to his teaching on lethal violence. I hope, within that inevitability, that those who learn from Yoder will understand how broad and *how politically radical* a theology of nonviolence is and can become. I hope unbelievers and Jews and those in the mainline church will not dismiss Yoder's politics and jurisprudence by deciding to *tolerate* it.

Yoder said his social ethics, his politics, his jurisprudence "has something to do with whether we are able to talk back to the authorities, whether we have the psychic wherewithal to see our world the way the New Testament saw its world." This has involved concern, among aggressive pacifists, for the fact that modern liberal democracy does not imprison, torture, and kill them, as Catholic Christendom and the Christians of the Reformation killed Anabaptists. It has to do even with the fact that pacifists, particularly "peace church" pacifists in modern America, don't have to *suffer* for their faith as much as their forebears did.

"It has to do with whether the gratitude we feel because we have been taken in by authorities who are good to us because we're good to them—we pay our rent, we don't revolt—whether that gratitude has destroyed our capacity to see the monstrosity of rampant nationalism for what it is...the ease with which we have fallen into a simplification of the problem in the past, assuming that the relation of church to world

is a stable polarity. The world's out there, we are over here, we are polarized, but we are also settled into that differentness, so that we have to let the world go its way while we go our way." (158)

The thing for aggressive pacifists is to hold on to "apocalyptic tension" with the world, never to say that what the world is is all right just because we're different. (159) "Being 'sectarian' may free us from despair at our failure to get things done fast, but it won't free us from responsibility." (159) "To hope and solidarity let us add the accountability that means that we won't go off alone." (160)